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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003018

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, PRM/ANE
GENEVA FOR RMA
NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PREF](#) [SMIG](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES THAKSIN AND LAO HMONG WITH
DEPUTY PM

REF: A. BANGKOK 3009 THAKSIN PULLS THE PLUG
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3003 AMBASSADOR MEETS THAKSIN,S SISTER
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2455 AMBASSDOR MEETS CROWN PRINCE ADVISOR
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 2260 PALACE OFFICIALS QUASH RUMORS
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 3015 ABHISIT CANCELS CHIANG MAI TRIP

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY/COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) The Ambassador met with Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban on November 27 to discuss the latest political developments in Thailand. The Ambassador outlined for Suthep USG outreach efforts with Thaksin's inner circle and core "red-shirt" leaders in recent weeks (REF B), noting that we had consistently stressed the importance of carrying out any planned protests peacefully, while simultaneously underscoring the illegitimacy of political gains achieved through violence. DPM Suthep told the Ambassador that while the RTG was relieved that Thaksin had decided to call off the protests scheduled to start November 28, any relative peace would be short-lived, as Thaksin remained committed to using protests as a means of pressuring the King to grant him a royal pardon. The same fundamental political fault lines were still in place, according to Suthep, and as long as those remained unaddressed, political tensions would continue. Suthep worried about the possibility of someone assassinating Abhsit and asked whether the USG was aware of red-shirt training camps in Cambodia. On the subject of reconciliation prospects, Suthep told the Ambassador that there was no dialogue whatsoever between Thaksin and the government. According to Suthep, Thaksin had approached the Privy Council about opening negotiations, but Thaksin's insistence on a pardon and no jail time was simply unrealistic.

[1](#)2. (C) Turning to the subject of Lao Hmong refugees in Nong Khai and Petchabun, the Ambassador noted that PM Abhisit had

assured the Secretary in July there would be no mass forced repatriations, a position that had been reinforced by PM Abhisit and FM Kasit in November 5 meetings with the Ambassador and Deputy Assistant Secretary Marciel. Suthep told the Ambassador that in the interest of preserving good relations with the Lao government, Thailand was effectively ceding to Lao wishes on the issue. According to Suthep, the Lao government was determined to proceed expeditiously, and he urged the USG to dialogue directly with the Lao and work to solve the issue quickly. Suthep vowed to try and provide the Ambassador with a long-promised list of the screened-in Petchabun group (See paras 11-14).

13. (C) Comment: Suthep was clearly relieved to have the immediate burden of a large scale red shirt rally off of his back. He is pragmatic, however, and freely acknowledged the enormity of the task facing the Abhisit government as it works to move the country forward despite a relentless onslaught of challenges coming from Thaksin and his supporters. Suthep and the RTG may breathe a little easier knowing they won't have to worry about a sea of red in the streets in the next week, but the mid-term prognosis remains the same. End Summary and Comment.

USG - RED SHIRT DIALOGUE

14. (C) The Ambassador began the meeting by outlining for Suthep recent USG outreach efforts with Thaksin associates and red shirt leaders (Note: the November 27 meeting with DPM Suthep, who is in charge of security issues, was scheduled prior to the cancellation of expected red-shirt protests in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. We have actively sought out

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Thaksin's family members (sister Yingluck and ex-wife Pojamon) and core red-shirt leaders to urge them to denounce the extreme rhetoric that had recently emerged, and to disavow the use of violence going forward, see refs A and E. End Note). The Ambassador told Suthep that he had emphasized in these discussions that political gains achieved through violence were ultimately illegitimate. Violent protests also reflected poorly on Thailand as a whole and damaged the country's image, a message the Ambassador emphasized the USG would also convey to yellow shirts were the circumstances reversed -- and had done so in the 2008 yellow-shirt protests.

THAKSIN

15. (C) Suthep thanked the Ambassador for USG outreach efforts with Thaksin and the red shirts. Suthep described two types of red shirts who associate with Thaksin: those who were close to him and loyally supported him, as well as those who sought to use Thaksin for their own objectives. Suthep believed the majority of red-shirts were ideologically extreme, and he noted that thousands of red-shirts had already passed through red-shirt indoctrination schools.

16. (C) In terms of Thaksin's own motivations for maintaining control of the red-shirts, Suthep believed he was primarily interested in the movement as a vehicle to push his pardon case with the King. In the absence of any viable legal channels, Thaksin believed he could use the red-shirt movement to apply pressure on the King to grant him a pardon.

17. (C) Suthep told the Ambassador he was relieved that Thaksin had decided to cancel the upcoming protests, but he was not under any illusion this decision had any long term significance. The underlying dynamic had not changed at all, and Thaksin would continue to stir up trouble in an effort to eliminate his legal problems, recover his assets, and ultimately return to power.

18. (C) Suthep told the Ambassador there was no dialogue between Thaksin and the RTG at all. Thaksin had tried to reach out to members of the Privy Council in an attempt to barter his way back (REFS C and D), but these efforts had failed largely because Thaksin's baseline negotiating position was unrealistic. Thaksin wanted assurances that he would not serve a single day in jail, and there was essentially no legal mechanism by which this request could be accommodated, even if the King were inclined to grant him clemency. Suthep believed the King wanted to see the standoff with Thaksin resolved as quickly as possible, but Thaksin would need to adjust his expectations.

RED-SHIRTS

19. (C) While Suthep believed Thaksin was driven exclusively by a desire to avoid jail, recover his money and possibly eventually re-enter politics, Suthep thought many of the red-shirts were striving for a full blown revolution. Suthep suspected -- though he could not confirm -- that army leaders also believed the red-shirts sought to end Thailand's constitutional monarchy. Suthep did not believe the army would ever allow this to happen, however, and he vowed to personally work to preserve the monarchy as well.

10. (C) Suthep asked the Ambassador whether he had ever heard about red-shirt training camps and training facilities in Cambodia. The Ambassador told Suthep that he had not, but assured Suthep he would share any relevant information if it became available. Suthep also shared with the Ambassador

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concerns that PM Abhisit's life could be in jeopardy. Suthep told the Ambassador he was doing everything possible to protect him, and he noted that he had advised the PM to avoid traveling to Chiang Mai on November 29 because of the possible risks.

LAO HMONG

11. (C) The Ambassador reminded Suthep of the RTG's recent high level assurances that the Hmong would not be forcibly repatriated, before stressing that the USG wanted to work with the RTG and the Lao to avoid forced repatriations. Without directly stating that circumstances had changed since the RTG made those promises, Suthep told the Ambassador that the USG should move quickly to solve the Lao Hmong problem, warning the Ambassador that very little time remained. Given the fact that Thai relations were already strained with Cambodia and less than ideal with Burma, the last thing the RTG could afford at this point was a major dispute with the Lao government. With that in mind, the RTG felt obliged to submit to Lao wishes on this issue, and the Lao were eager to act with dispatch. The RTG had tried to push back the timeframe as outlined by the Lao, but had been unsuccessful thus far.

12. (C) Suthep told the Ambassador that while he feared this issue might not be settled smoothly, he believed the Lao were working to make some accommodations. The 158 UNHCR-recognized Lao Hmong in Nong Khai would be allowed to move to a third country, for example, though the Lao government had denied RTG requests to repatriate them directly from Thailand. This group would first have to return to Laos, Suthep said, where they would have a separate area to stay. Provided a third government emerged that was willing to re-settle this group, they would then eventually be allowed to proceed there. The RTG was listening to Laos, he said, and the situation was fluid.

13. (C) The Ambassador noted that although the USG also wished to see the situation resolved as quickly as possible, it was impossible to move forward without the long-promised list of Hmong in Petchabun that Thai military officials had

told us repeatedly had been screened in after arrival in Thailand. The USG had also demonstrated flexibility, the Ambassador noted, pointing out that the USG had acceded to the idea of moving the Hmong back to Laos for a short period before being repatriated to a third country. While all parties could agree to work expeditiously to solve this problem, the Ambassador stressed that there was a proper way to do it. A forcible repatriation would cause a major uproar in the U.S. Congress and elsewhere, and the ramifications would likely be severe.

¶14. (C) Suthep agreed to look into the matter of the list of the screened-in group of Hmong in Petchabun and to try to provide this to the U.S. If the USG could move quickly, problems could be avoided. Suthep urged the USG to dialogue directly with the Lao government, and the Ambassador assured Suthep that was already the case.
JOHN